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ABSTRACT

Seven countries--Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Hungary, Italy, and Japan--participated in a comparative study of television programing and audiences. Four statistical indicators--structure of programs broadcast, availability of programing, potential viewing and actual viewing--were used to analyze over 25 categories of programing, which for the sake of clarity were reduced to three: information, culture and education, and entertainment. Results, including data from the United States, indicated that information programs accounted for 30% of all programing, cultural and education programing for about 18%, and entertainment for approximately 52%. Considering both offerings and availability revealed that the greater the number of networks the more competition there is for most types of programing. Entertainment programs dominated "prime time" offerings in every country, yet actual viewing demand for them still exceeded their supply. At the same time, the supply of culture and education programs exceeded the demand for them. The findings suggest that in spite of differences in countries and cultures, audience behaviors are generally similar. (JL)

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An international comparison of television programming and audiences

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INTRODUCTION

A number of difficulties arise when one attempts to establish international comparisons. One of the more frequent problems is the making of comparisons with data that are already and have been collected by other researchers. Although the objectives of the studies may be the same, often inconsistencies in the methodologies used and time periods when data was collected have to be taken into account.

On the other hand, taking on the task of collecting data for an entire international study makes it necessary to decide between two different approaches. The first possibility is to have one centrally located research team which proceeds by means of contacts in different countries to collect as broad a set of data possible. This approach of course has the difficulty that the researcher has little control over the self selection process of respondants and limited insight into the particular intracacies of the cultural systems of each of those countries participating. The other approach is to mount a study in collaboration with other national research groups. However to assure that methodologies are similar and compatible for the analysis of cultural systems which vary greatly, one must have sufficient time to compare and pretest the data collection instruments.

With these concerns in mind we set out to do a study whose purpose was to gather an international set of data pertaining to cultural policies of television programming. It was intended that the research, executed by distint national research teams for each country, use the same methodology. The data collection period was also to be as close to identical as possible between countries. A training period and pretest of all instruments would permit the necessary changes so that particularities of each culture would be respected.

In 1978 the French Commission for Unesco organised preliminary meetings which were intended to finalize the general research

design. Seven countries accepted to participate (Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan), in this joint study. The analysis was to include all prime time (18:00-24:00) TV programs broadcast over a three week period in these seven countries. Michel Souchon of l'Institut National de l'Audio-visuel was named a principal coordinator of the project. His earlier research[1] in developing statistical indicators to analyze the structure of television programming was taken as the basis for the analysis.

Four statistical indicators were taken into account in conducting this joint study.

The first three indicators developed by Souchon, were: structure of programs broadcast; structure of potential viewing and structure of viewing. Gabriel Thoveron[2], through his own research on television programming, added the fourth indicator which considered the analysis of available programs. Although prior to undertaking this joint study, each of the authors of this paper, individually developped, his own category system [3-4-5] to classify television programming, a general consensus was reached between all participants in the joint study to use, with some modifications, those

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1. Souchon, Michel. La télévision et son public, 1974-1977 Documentation française.

2. Thoveron, Gabriel. Offre et demande de média en Belgique francophone. Communication pour la conférence internationale de Brixen-Neustift 1978, 16p.

3. Caron, André. Images of different worlds: a comparison between French and English television networks in: Violence in Television films and news. Report of the Royal Commission on violence in the communications industry, vol 3. Toronto, 1977.

4. Thoveron, Gabriel. Radio et télévision dans la vie quotidienne Bruxelles: Institut de Sociologie de l'ULB, 1971, 900p.

5. Souchon, Michel. Lettre ouverte à Messieurs les directeurs de la Télévision in Etudes, janvier 1975, pp. 15-45.

norms adopted at the 1976 Unesco meetings in Nairobi. A detailed operationalized definition of these categories and of the four indicators used appears in a report titled Principes méthodologiques[6]. The study reported here took a number of years in planning and execution and several preliminary comparisons of data to simply pretest the instruments[7-8].

Before presenting the results let us briefly describe the methodological concepts used.

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6. Trois semaines de Télevison, Une comparaison internationale, Principes méthodologiques, Paris, Commission Française pour l'Unesco - Insitut National de l'Audio-Visuel, juillet 1979.

7. Les télévisions francophones; Étude composée: France Belgique Québec. Cahiers JEB, Bruxelles, Direction Générale Jeunesse et Loisirs, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Culture Française, 2/80/, 150pp.

8. Étude conjointe: la politique culturelle à la télévision dans quatre pays, Belgique, Bulgarie, France, Hongrie, comptes rendus des résultats de la phase préparatoire, Paris, Commission Française pour l'Unesco, juillet 1979.

METHOD

INDICATORS

Structure of programs broadcast: the first indicator used is probably one of the more simpler ones to comprehend. To evaluate it one proceeds by doing basically a content analysis, categorizing program content, and suming up the number of minutes corresponding to each category. These totals may then be converted into percentages and allow for comparisons of the relative importance of information programs in various countries.

Availability of programming takes into account the fact that only one program can be watched at a time. Thus with four channels available in a community in the evening between 7:00 and 7:30 and if channel I presents the news, channel 2 Alice, channel 3 Archie Bunker and Channel 4 Diff'rent Strokes, the true availability in programming for our viewer in this community is between an information program and a comedy series. Although for our first indicator we calculated for this time period a total of 30 minutes of information and 90 minutes of comedy, the availability of these programs, is actually 30 minutes of information and 30 minutes of comedy. This indicator is then especially useful to verify if the structure of programming relies more on a complementarity or a competition approach.

Potential viewing is an indicator which attempts to approximate the maximum number of viewers who could potentially be watching television at a given time period. Although B.B.M.[9] and Nielsen ratings attempts to do this in part, to have a perfectly reliable reading of people's availability to watch television it would be necessary to do a very extensive study of lifestyles. Given that such exhaustive data pertaining to television were not readily available in those countries participating in the joint study we used the data

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9. Bureau of Broadcasting Measurement (Canada).

which approximated most nearly the greatest number of potential viewers. Thus we retained the highest number of viewers for all channels combined, on one given day and time period, averaged over a 3 week period. If the area of coverage for certain networks varied, this was also taken into account and was reflected in the indicator.

For example, if the maximum number of viewers watching television was, let us say 62% of the population, the potential number of minutes watched by the entire population for a 30 minute program would be .62 x 30 minutes = 18.6 minutes.

Actual viewing: this final indicator relies on the usual television ratings and takes into account the actual number of minutes of a program viewed by the population. Thus a 60 minute program of variety, watched by 30% of the population, would be counted as 18 minutes of actual viewing.

CATEGORIES

Finally it should be noted that the underlying category system used in this study, refers to "genres" characteristic of the programming found in those countries participating in the joint study. Although a detailed multi-dimensional system of classification, comprising over 25 categories[10] of programs, was used, for obvious reasons we shall present in this report our data using only more simplified categories. Origin of programs was also taken into account in this study but because of time and space limitations this will not be discussed in this paper.

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10. Information: include all news, information magazines and public affairs programs.
Culture and education: include programs which have an explicit objective to educate or stimulate one's artistic or intellectual curiosity (e.g. ballet, theater, sciences, history, ecology, etc.).
Entertainment: include fiction (films, dramatic or comedy series) and other entertainment programs (varieties, game shows, circus and sports).

SAMPLE

The analysis included all prime time TV programs, between 18 hrs and 24 hrs, broadcast over a three week period in November of 1979 in the seven countries participating in the joint study[11].

Briefly, the area of broadcasting and the networks considered for each country were as follows.

Table 1

Country	Area	Network
Belgium:	Bruxelles and Wallonie (francophone area)	RTBF (public) Télé 2 (public) RTL (private Luxembourg) TFI (public France) Antenne 2 (public France) FR3 (public France)
Bulgaria:	Department and city of Sofia	2 national networks (public)
Canada:	Greater Montréal area	Société Radio Canada (public) C.B.C. (public) Société Radio Québec (public) T.V.A. (private) C.T.V. (private) C.B.S. (private, U.S.A.) N.B.C. (private, U.S.A.) Thus 3 French language and 4 English language networks
France:	National coverage	TF1 (public) A2 (public) FR 3 (public)
Hungary:	National coverage	2 national networks (public)
Italy:	National coverage	RAI I (public) RAI 2 (public)
Japan:	Kanto area	NHK I (public) NHK II (public) FUJI TV (private) TBS (private) NTV (private) TV Asahi (private) TOKYO channel 12 (private)

11. One must note that in Japan the data could only be collected over a 1 week period in November. In Bulgaria the data was collected,

Thus a comparison of programming on twenty six television channels in seven countries was made[12]. For the purpose of this paper we have distinguished from the canadian results, the data pertaining to two american networks, C.B.S. and N.B.C. Although this only presents a partial view of the television broadcasting system in the U.S.A., more recent data (1981) including the three major networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) and PBS will also be mentioned[13] in the discussion and will give us a certain indication of the overall comparability of programs.

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because of technical reasons in the Spring of 1980. In terms of ratings, age groups considered were those 15 years old and over in Belgium, France and Italy, 18 years olds and over in Hungary 7 years olds and over in Bulgaria and Japan and 2 years old and over in Canada.

12. A more detailed version of the data reported in this paper may be found in a report titled "Trois semaines de télévision: une comparaison internationale". Rapport INA 1980. A partial summary of this data was presented by Michel Souchon for the group of European Audience Researchers and may also be found in "Trois semaines, Sept pays, Vingt-six chaînes de télévision" les Cahiers de la communication, Dunod, Paris vol 1, no 1, 1981, pp. 37-50.

13. The authors would like to thank Joanne Archambault, Michel Saint-Laurent and Chantal Mayrand for their assistance in this part of the analysis.

RESULTS

Actual broadcastings

As we have previously stated this indicator reveals the total percentage of time accounted for by each category of programs on all channels for each country.

If one looks at our data first in terms of three broad categories, of programs, information, culture and education, and entertainment the following comparisons appear. Overall information programs account for roughly 30% of the total programming with 12% of this pertaining to public affairs. Italy with 38% and Japan with 22.2% furnish the highest and lowest scores respectively, all other countries including the U.S.A. remaining relatively close to the average. The data we recently collected confirm this with a percentage of 27,7% for all four american networks. When one considers culture/ education programs the average (18%) is much lower, with the U.S.A. (,08%) and Canada (11,8%) having the smallest percentage and Bulgaria the highest 24,5%. Our new set of data for the U.S.A., including PBS, reveals on overall percentage of 7,2% for this category.

Finally fiction and other types of entertainment programs account overall for approximately 52% of all broadcast time with the highest score in the U.S.A. (72,7%) (64,7% if one considers the four U.S. networks) and in Japan (59,3%) and the lowest in France (44,8%). Overall this category of program remains the most popular and combined with Information leaves very little place for cultural/education type programming. One also notices that this occurence is even more likely in those countries such as the U.S.A., Japan and Canada where advertising and private networks are most present.

Table 2

To better appreciate this latter point let us look at more detailed profiles of these countries (Belgium Canada Japan and the U.S.A.) in terms of private and public networks[14].

If one looks at fiction and other entertainment programs one notices that this category alone accounts for over 70% of programming by private broadcasters in the four countries in question. The data recently collected for the two american networks show no substantial change over time on this point. In the public sector no single network presents more than 56% of this type of programming.

This thus leaves more room for information programs which occur in substantiably greater numbers on public networks (42%) than private networks (25%) and to a lesser extent to culture/education programs (public 12% vs private 4%).

Table 3-4

Economic status therefore clearly accounts for part of the divergent program policies established. But if we carefully examined the Canadian data one also notices differences appearing in terms of language of broadcast. Thus comparing French language networks with all English language networks (including american networks) one observes on the one hand that, in terms of programming offered to the public, few differences appear for information programs but on the other hand entertainment type programming, although important for both groups, appears less so on the French language networks which allows for more program of the culture/education "genre".

Table 5

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14. We will consider here public networks who do not have an explicit educational or cultural mandate thus excluding SRQ in Québec, NHK2 in Japan and PBS in the U.S.A.

Although this first indicator is worthwhile the fact remains that availability of programming must also be considered to see which category of programs compete between each other.

Available programming

As we previously mentioned, this indicator takes into account the actual availability of categories of programming. One might think that viewers who have access to a greater number of television networks would have a greater choice of categories of programs to choose form. However if the networks program on the basis of competition rather than of complementarity the choice may remain quite limited.

The first question one may ask is how available are certain types of programs throughout the prime time period investigated. In other words what is the percentage of time that could be spent watching information programs in a given country. The following table shows that if I am in Belgium, Canada or Japan more than 70% of the time overall could be spent watching information programs. In the U.S.A., Canada and Japan a higher percentage of time could be spent watching fiction programs. In France culture and education type programs are available more than half the time.

Table 6

Taking into account offer and availability of programming we obtain an even better indicator of the strategy employed by networks for each country. This is especially true when a correction factor for number of networks is applied[15]. Thus if one obtains a perfect

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15. The following correction factor was used: $ID = \frac{(an/md) - r}{1-r}$

a = minutes available; md = minutes broadcast; r = the lowest theoritical difference possible between minutes available and broadcast in a given country (1/2 = 0,50 in countries with only 2 networks, and 1/7 in countries with 7 networks).

score of 1 this means the networks are perfectly complementary and do not program the same types of programs over the same time periods. If one obtains a score approaching zero then we have greater competitiveness between networks.

Table 7

Availability of programming with correction factor

	Bulgaria	Hungary	Italy	France	Belgium	Canada	Japan	U.S.A.
(Number of networks)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(3)	(6)	(7)	(7)	(2)
Information	,96	,76	,44	,55	,30	,26	,37	26,5
Cultural	,83	1,00	,89	,62	,68	,73	,65	1,00
Fiction	,96	,85	,58	,49	,29	,16	,27	28,4
Other Entertainment	,87	,95	,84	,66	,45	,51	,39	67,8

Generally one notices that the greater the number of networks in a country the more competition there is for most type of programming. This is abundantly clear in the Belgium, Canadian, and Japanese data where Information programs appear to be presented at similar time periods. This is also true for fiction type programs. Cultural programs, on the other hand, appear to be in a lesser state of competition. It might be speculated that the presence of public broadcasters can possibly explain this. The one exception to this pattern is the American data, based on 2 private networks, which show high competition between these networks for information and fiction and low competition for cultural programs. Even with the addition of the third private network (ABC) and PBS it is unlikely these percentages would greatly vary. Thus the U.S.A. with a smaller number of networks and the presence of a public broadcasting system (albeit quite different from those of other countries in terms of government support) presents a pattern of general high competitiveness because of the particularities of it's broadcasting system.

Potential viewing

This third indicator reveals to us the favorability of time slot occupied by certain categories of programs. Thus the higher the number of potential viewers available for the program the higher the percentage obtained in the following table.

The most obvious observation is that entertainment programs in all countries are favored in the "prime time" slots especially if we compare this with the data in table 2 which show what is offered. Information programs are the following programs favored in terms of time slot and this quite evenly in most countries except Japan where time scheduling seems less advantageous and in Italy where it is more favored.

Culture and education programs are more favored in the program schedule of such countries as Bulgaria, Japanese and France and less so in Italy and the U.S.A. (in this latter case omisssion of PBS must be considered). Thus there appears to be a trade off in many countries between Information and culture/education programs. If one category is high the other will be low. Fiction and entertainment programs remain unaffected by this and tend to be scheduled at peak prime time in all countries.

Table 8

Potential viewing

	Information		Culture/Education		Entertainment	
Percentage by category and country	Japan	17,3%	U.S.A.	1,1%	Bulgaria	50,3%
	U.S.A.	23,2%	Italy	8,8%	France	51,7%
	Canada	26,1%	Hungary	12,3%	Italy	51,9%
	Hungary	26,3%	Canada	12,5%	Belgium	55,9%
	France	27,1%	Belgium	14,2%	Canada	57,5%
	Bulgaria	29,4%	France	18,3%	Hungary	57,8%
	Belgium	29,7%	Japon	18,9%	Japon	63,7%
	Italy	36,7%	Bulgaria	20,4%	U.S.A.	75,8%

Actual viewing

Now that we have considered what is offered, available, and potentially viewable, the actual behavior of television audiences is as follow. Information programs account for approximately 22% of one's viewing time. Culture/Education on the other hand represents only 5,5% of the total viewing time. This leaves us with the larger (72%) of our viewing time for entertainment programming. At an international level one notices that except for Italy and to a certain extent Bulgaria the viewing patterns for information programs in 5 of the remaining countries are quite similar. One must remember that the american data which is lowest of all countries represents solely Montrealers television viewing patterns for 2 american networks. Entertainment type programs have the highest audiences. Not surprisingly american networks are highly watched (89%) by Canadians for this type of program.

What is most noticeable is that the demand for culture and educational programs is less than the offer while the opposite is found for entertainment where the demand far exceeds the offer.

The two exceptions to the general pattern, Italy and Bulgaria, require special explanation. For the former country, only the two state owned networks were considered and we have seen previously that when one considers only public networks, programming tends to appear more diversified. In the latter case, Bulgaria, it is possible that if foreign networks from Yougoslavia for example had been considered the percentage would have been more similar.

Thus countries of very different cultures, different economic systems and broadcasting structures show audience behaviors which are at least in terms of general categories much more similar than different. this is evenmore surprising if one remembers the differences between countries in terms of programming offered. Our last table presents this comparison in terms of supply and demand.

Table 10

Supply		Demand
30%	information	22%
18%	culture/education	5,5%
52%	entertainment	72%

CONCLUSION

Although our preliminary comparison between Belgium, Canada and France had given us indications that similar viewing patterns might exist between countries, one of the more interesting result of this study is that this is also found in a variety of other countries.

A study such as this one, using statistical indicators, also permits us to compare how these policies evolve over time. The data we have recently collected in Canada already shows us that within 2 years there has been some change with canadian networks increasing their information type programs. In the U.S. their is some indication that other types of entertainment programs have increased in importance while fiction has slightly decreased.

This study is also of interest given that some of the countries participating still retain the more traditional structure of broadcasting (limited numbers of channels) while others have passed to a forward-looking schedule which include more type of broadcasting with foreign television and a greater number of channels. Although the transition from one type of system to an other will bring about some changes, at least, the changed patterns, appear unlikely to disrupt the structure of viewer preferences.

This is not to say that one should simply sit back and develop no policies. As we have also noted availability of programs and potential viewing also contribute to preferences or certain categories of programs. This is most evident when one considers the structure of detailed categories which reveal differences between countries in applying cultural policies for television.

This study brings to light many more questions than answers. One might want for example to look more into the cultural, language or age differences between subgroups. Heavy, medium and light viewers probably also make distinctive choices which are not accounted for in this analysis.

In carrying out the study we had to apply strict definitions of category programs. This, of course, has the advantage that the same category system is applied by all researchers basicaly in the same way, however it might have lead us sometimes to categorize some programs inaccurately such as categorizing a certain type of film as entertainment rather than culture. To correct this a detailed content analysis of each program would have had to be done and this, at an international level, would have taken such time that the data would have probably been outdated by the time it would have been completely analysed. We do believe however that futur research should allow for a certain qualitative analyses which would complement the statistical indicators.

This study[16] remains for us a starting point which we hope will be pursued by other researchers also interested in the present and futur structure of international television broadcasting.

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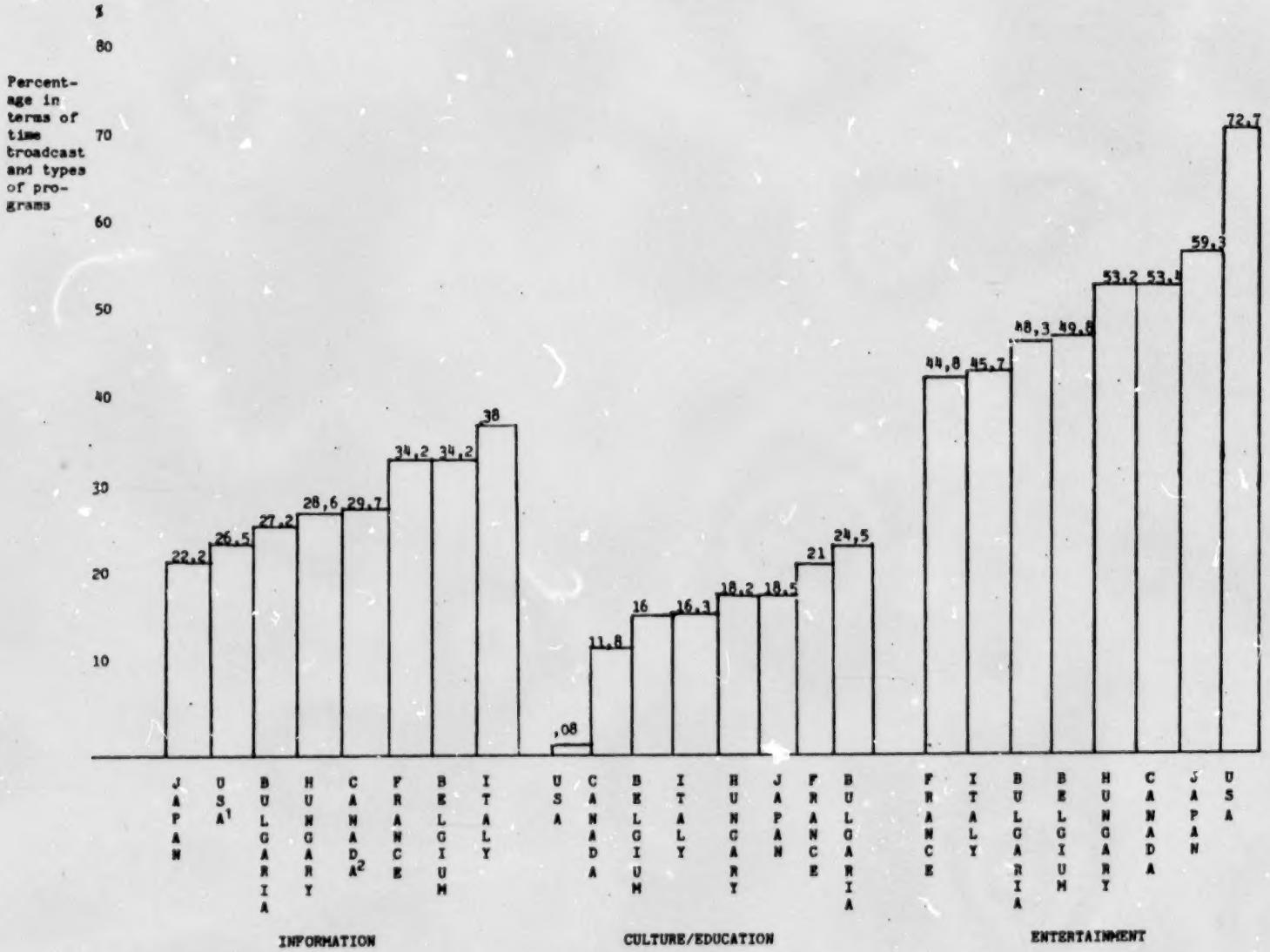
16. The final report of this international comparison will shortly be published by Unesco in it's series "Cultural cooperation: studies and experiences".

Table 2

Actual Broadcasting
For all countries



1. U.S.A.: includes two networks CBS and NBC. More recent data for all four networks reveal the following: information 27,7%; culture/education 7,2%; entertainment 64,7%.

2. CANADA: data excludes the two american networks CBS and NBC

Table 3

Actual broadcasting on private networks in Belgium Canada, Japan and the U.S.A.

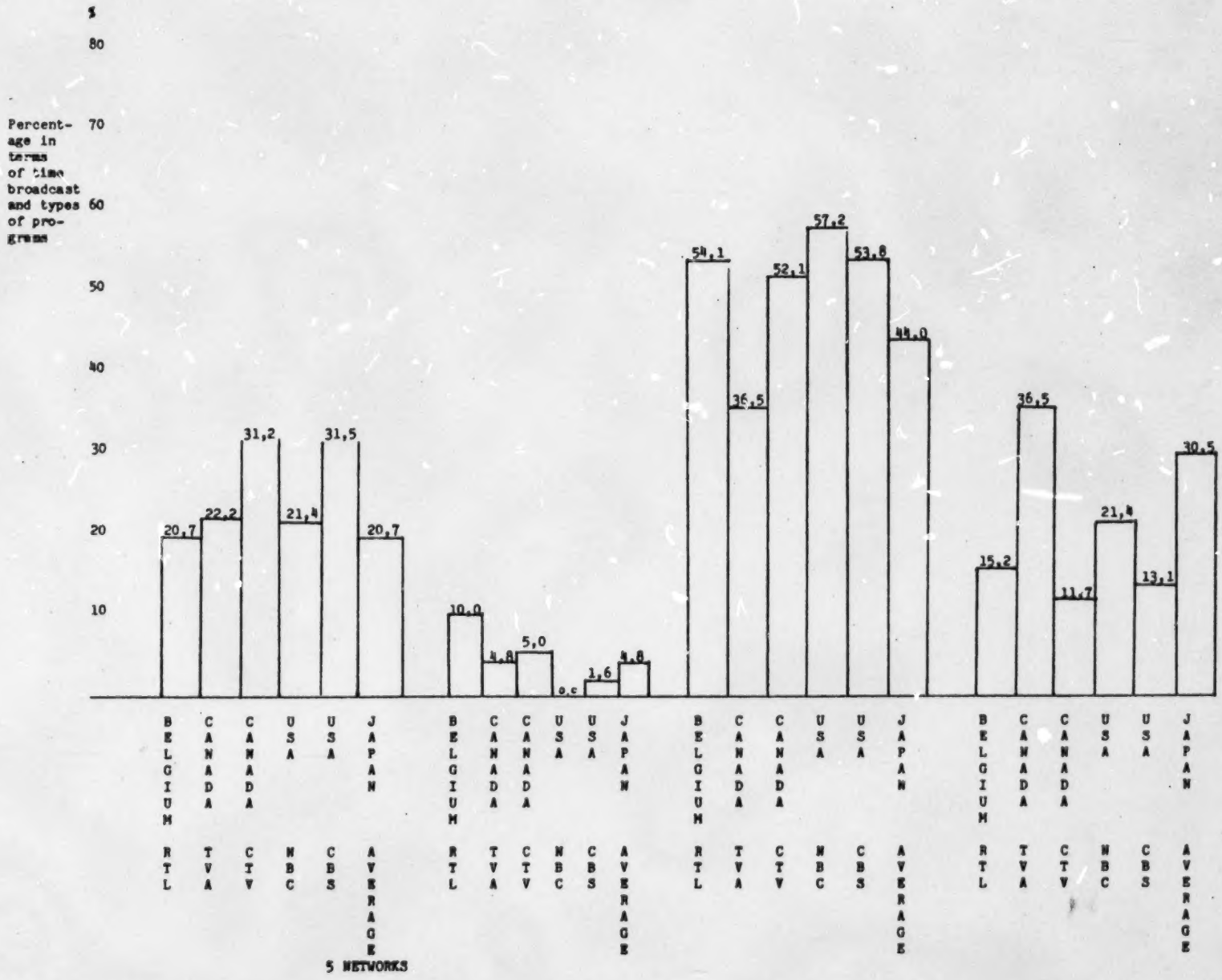
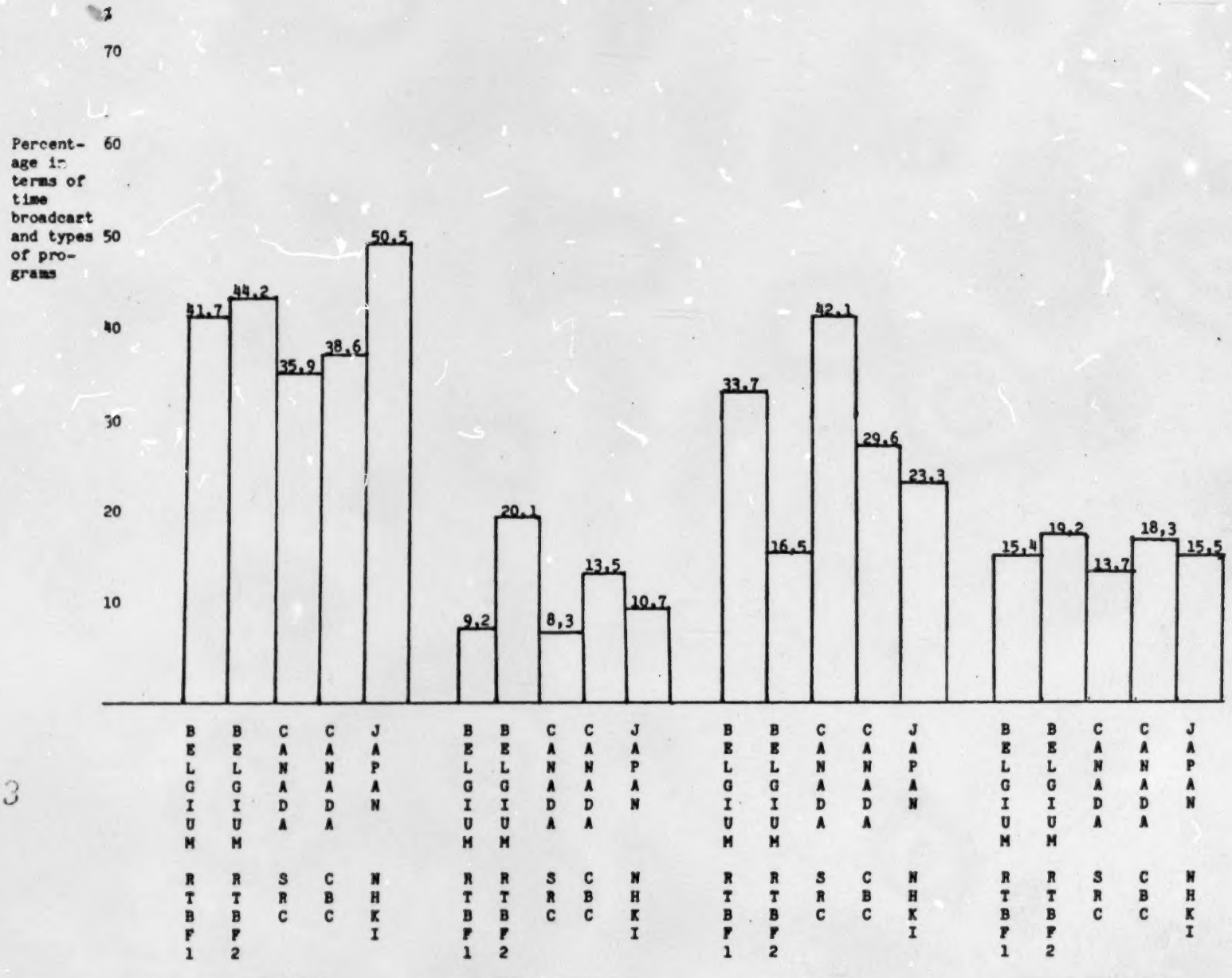


Table 4

Actual broadcasting on public networks in
Belgium, Canada and Japan

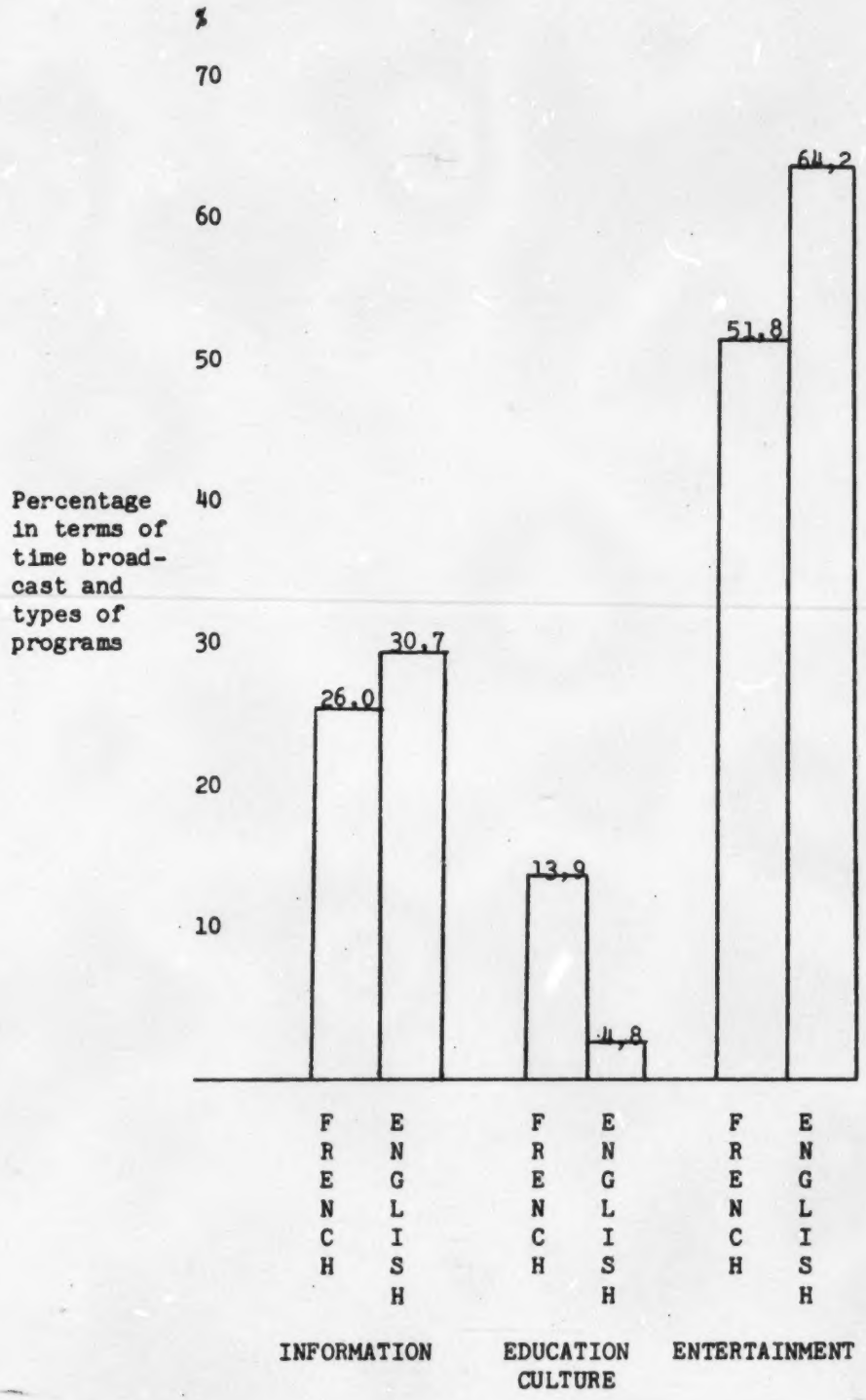


23

24.

Table 5

Actual broadcasting in Canada in terms of language

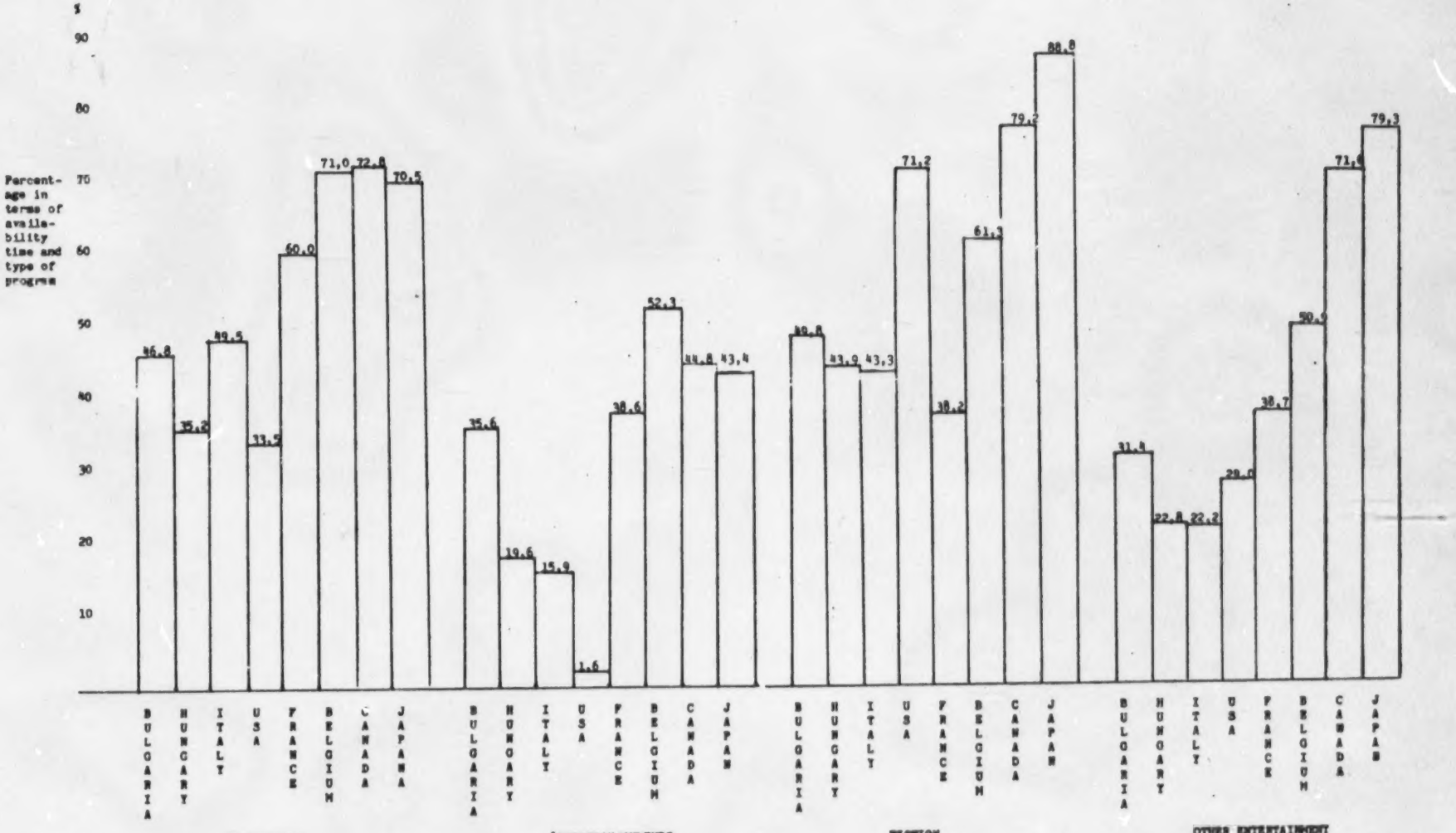


French networks: Société Radio-Canada
Société Radio-Québec
T.V.A.

English networks: C.B.C., N.B.C., C.T.V., C.B.S.

Table 6

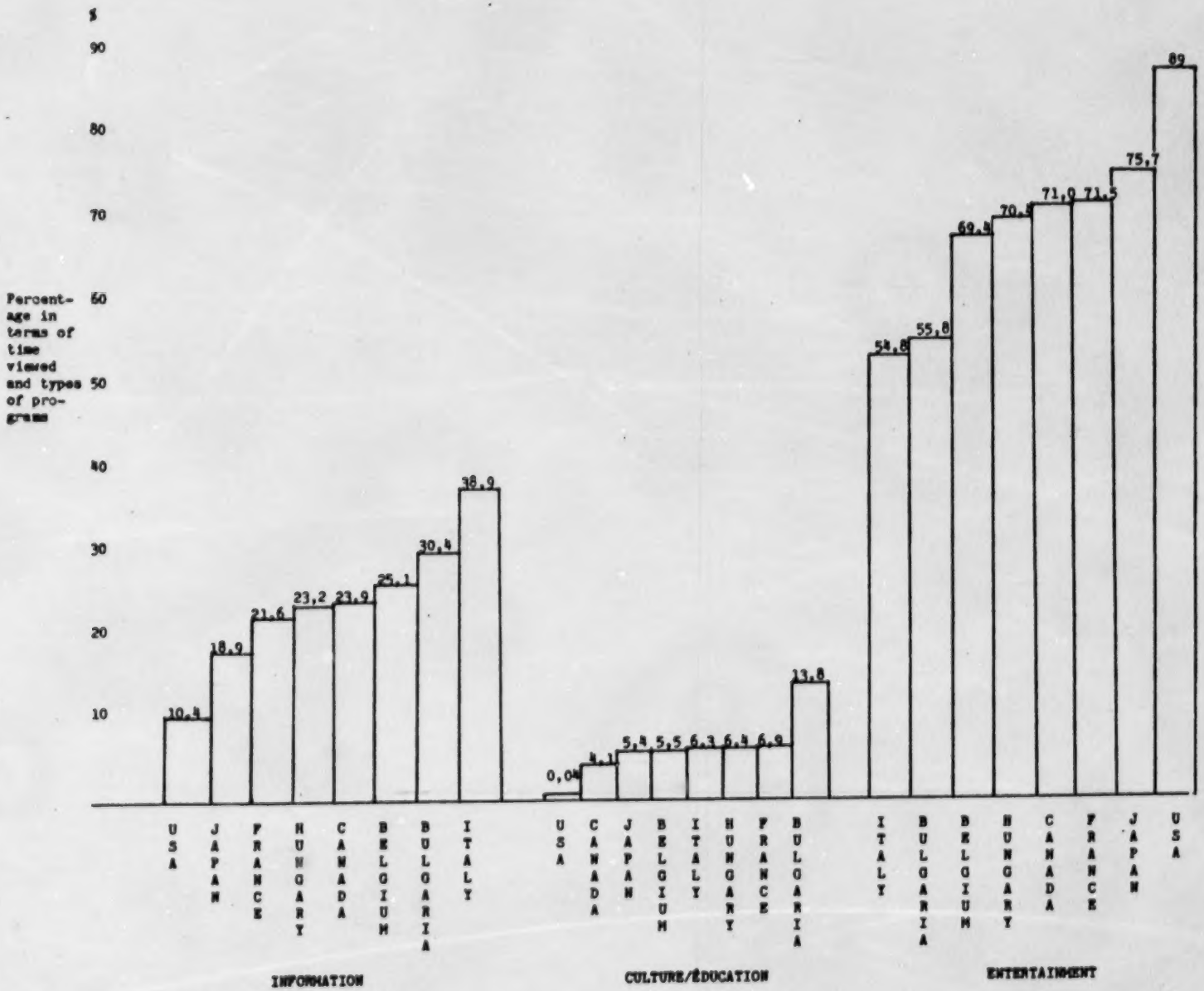
Available programming
for all countries



Note: U.S.A.: includes two networks.
CANADA: for technical reasons data reported here include all seven networks.

Table 9

Actual viewing



Note: U.S.A.: includes only 2 networks